

1608/1570.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
MAYOR and ALDERMEN
OF THE
CITY of *CHESTER*,
IN THE
Church of *St. Oswald* in *CHESTER*,
ON THE

Eighth Day of *March*, 1712.

Being the
Day of Her MAJESTIES Happy
Accession to the

THRONE.

By *JOHN OLIVER*, A. M.
Minister of *St. Peters*, and Prebendary of the
Cathedral Church in *Chester*.

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To the Right Worshipful

*John Thomason, Esq; Mayor
of the City of Chester,
Roger Comberbach, Esq;
Recorder, and to the Al-
dermen, Sheriffs, and the
rest of the Members of
this City.*

T H I S Sermon upon
the Eighth of *March*,
is humbly Dedicated, by

Your most Obliged Humble Servant,



John Oliver.

A
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MAYOR and ALDERMEN
OF THE
City of CHESTER, &c.

PSALM xcvi. Verse I.

*The Lord Reigneth, let the Earth
Rejoyce, let the Multitude of the
Isles be glad thereof.*

THAT the World was made at first
by a Being, infinitely Wise and Pow-
erful, must be readily own'd by every one
that has not lay'd aside his Reason, to gra-
tifie some vicious Inclinations of his own
Heart: For who can take but a slight Sur-
vey of this Vast and Magnificent Build-

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ing of Nature, and consider the great Variety and Excellency of the Parts that go to its Composition, the Admirable Frame and Contexture of them, the exact Symmetry and Proportion that is amongst 'em, the great Usefulness and Subserviency of every Member, to all the rest, and the Regular Motions, Rules, and Orders that are observed by them; I say, who can run over all this, even with a Transient Superficial View, and yet be so Senseless and Stupid as to imagine that all was brought about by meer Chance and Accident, by a casual Reincounter of some small Particles of Matters, which after a Thousand Tryals and Efforts in vain, at last very luckily fell into this wonderful surprising Frame; or rather, who can forbear to say, in the Language of the Inspired King, *The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-Work*, and to confess with all sober Men, that this great Stupendious Pile, was no other but the Scheme and Contrivance of an Infinite Understanding, the Labour and Production of Irresistable Power, and Unbounded Goodness.

And as the World could not be formed without such an Almighty Agent, no more could it be kept up, Maintained, and Govern'd without the constant Care and Vigilance



giance of a never-failing Providence: The Inabilities of all second Causes to support their own Beings, to exert their Natural Powers and Capacities, to pursue the Ends of their Creation, are so many Irrefragable Proofs of some unseen Hand, that guides all the Springs of this great *Machine*, and enables them to Accomplish the Designs of Eternal Wisdom. And if we extend our Thoughts beyond the less noble Parts of the Universe, to the Race of Men, and to Humane Societies; if we consider the Rise and Progress of the greatest Empires, from Poor and Mean Beginnings, the Fall and Declension of the same, from their Towering Heights by the most Contemptible Causes, the many Signal Deliverances that Righteous States have met with in their greatest Extremities, and the Remarkable Judgments that have overtaken a Wicked and Impenitent People; if we reflect upon the many Wonderful Changes and Revolutions that have happened in all Nations, and how the exact Period of their Accomplishing in some particular Instances has been foretold and pointed at several Ages before they came to pass, we shall have a Cloud of Witnessesses to confirm our Faith in that great Article, that there is a God who Ruleth in Heaven, and over all the Kingdoms of the Earth,

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Earth, and that Perswasion will lead us to the Inference the *Psalmist* makes from this Doctrine, *that the Earth may well Rejoyce, and the Multitude of the Isles be glad of it,* since the Peace and Happiness of Mankind is so very much concern'd in this Great and Important Truth.

In the Words, I shall consider these two Things.

First, The Doctrine of an Active Providence, presiding over all the Parts of the World, *The Lord Reigneth.*

Secondly, The Usefulness of this Doctrine to the whole Creation, and especially to all Orders and Ranks of Men; *Let the Earth Rejoyce.*

And *First*, For the Doctrine it Self, that there is an Active Providence, which concerns it Self in all the Affairs of the World, which Influences and Disposes all Things according to his Eternal Counsel, is so very Evident, that we cannot form any Notion of God agreeable to his Nature, but what will necessarily infer such a Wise and Steady Government here below. For a Being of Infinite Perfections, as God is, must be Furnisht with Infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and the like; these are real Excellencies and Endowments in what Being soever they are found, and consequently must be in God, the Cause
and

and Fountain of all Perfections, and that without all Bounds and Measures : But to what purpose are all these Properties and Attributes ascribed to God, if we deny his Providence, and divest him of the Rule and Government of the World : For what does an Almighty Power signifie, that sits Idle, without ever exerting it self in Powerful Actions, or an Infinite Wisdom signifie that fixes no Ends, nor orders any Means to attain them, or Infinite Goodness, that never shews it self in any Acts of Kindness or Beneficence ; if we deprive all these Perfections of their due and proper Exercise, as we must do if there be no such thing as a Providence in the World, we do indeed give the Deity many Glorious Characters, but they stand for nothing, we make him a great Cypher, an useless insignificant Thing, Cloath'd with many Glittering Empty Titles, which is all one as no God at all ; so that to allow a God, and disown his Providence, as *Epicurus* did, is to suppose a God that is good for nothing, which is the same thing as to deny his Existence ; and he that allows the One and denies the Other, is as much an *Atheist*, to all Intents and Purposes, as he that denies Both.

And as the Nature of God leads us to the Belief and Acknowledgment of his Providence,

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vidence, so the Nature of all Created Beings does Absolutely require it; the Conservation of things is no less an Act of Infinite Power, than the Creation of them; for since there is no such necessary Connexion betwixt the Moments of Time, so as that one Moment should by a natural and necessary Causality produce another, it will follow that that which could not give it self the First Minute of its Being, could not give it self a Second, a Third, and so on, and consequently the Continuation of all things will require the same Power as went to their First Production: And as the Creatures could not Preserve themselves in Being without an Almighty Power to Support them, to be sure neither could they Move or Act, or Perform any thing proper to their several Species without the same Assistance, nor could they pursue the Ends of their Creation so Regularly and Constantly as they do, of which Ends all the Creatures in the World below Man are utterly Ignorant and Insensible; I say 'tis Impossible they should pursue those Ends, and apply themselves to the Means that lead to them, unless they were Conducted by some invisible Hand and Guided in their Course by an unerring Wisdom.

So that whether we consider the Nature of God, or the Necessities of the Creatures,
if

if we allow his Attributes to be something more than empty Names and insignificant Titles, or if we allow all Infinite Beings to be as unable to Preserve and Govern as they were to Create themselves, the Doctrine of a Providence will unavoidably follow from these Premises.

And this Doctrine is such a necessary Basis and Foundation of Religion, that the holy Oracles are in no one Thing more Copious and Particular, than in Reciting the Various Acts of Providence to beget in us a just Idea of the Greatness of the Divine Majesty, and oblige us to a constant Adoration of the same.

Thus they assure us, that the High and Lofty One, who Inhabiteth Eternity, whose Throne is in the Heavens, and who is serv'd with the profoundest Submissions of Angels and Arch-Angels, and all the Orders of that Celestial Hierarchy, thinks it no Disparagement to his Greatness, to Humble himself, to behold and manage all the Transactions that fall out in this Lower World : That he hath appointed the Moon for certain Seasons, that he hath set a Tabernacle for the Sun, which cometh forth every Morning as a Bridegroom, and Rejoyceth as a Gyant to Run his Course, that he telleth the Number of the Stars, and calleth them all by their Names, and in general, that all that passeth

in the Regions above, as Fire and Hail, Snow and Vapours, Wind and Storms, fulfil his Commands.

For this Earth we Inhabit, that all its Seminal Virtues are impregnated by his Influence, since he causeth the Grasse to grow on the Mountains, and Herbs and Plants for the Use of Men, and Cloaths it every Spring with an Embroidery far beyond *Solomon* in all his Glory.

And for the restless Ocean, that he has set Bounds and Limits to the Swelling Tydes, which they cannot exceed, and that at his bare Word, the Raging of its Billows, and Noise of its Waves are Husht into Silence and a Calm.

That all living Creatures are Nourisht by his Bounty, the Young Ravens when they Cry are Regarded by him, and the Lions Roaring after their Prey do seek their Meat from him : In a Word, the Eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their Meat in due Season.

And last of all, that Man is his Special Care, that he has made him but little Lower than the Angels, and by subjecting his Fellow-Creatures to him, has Imprinted on him some Rays and Signatures of his own Eternal Sovereignty, that the Incorporation of Single Persons into Larger Societies is his own Appointment, and Rulers and Magistrates are his Ordinance.

For

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For by him Kings Reign and Princes decree Justice, from him they derive their Authority, and through his Hands their Commissions pass; and so long as they follow the Pattern of Heaven, and Govern by the Rules of Justice and Righteousness, they are not only God's in Name, but real Images and Representations of the Eternal Monarch; and as they are Empowered by him only, to him only are they Accountable for their Administration, he calls in their Commissions at Pleasure, and revokes their Authority, and by various Instances makes them Sensible that *Omne sub Regno graviores Regnum est*, that his Kingdom is over all, and his Power not to be Question'd or Controul'd.

In the great Changes and Revolutions that fall out in States and Kingdoms, Men generally look no higher than second Causes, and impute all to them, some defect in Policy or Conduct was the reason of them we think, and so trouble our Heads no further, when indeed nothing is so much concerned as an invisible Providence, and a secret Decree of Heaven, so ordering things in Mercy to some, and in Judgment to others; and when the Decree is once past, nothing shall alter it, the best Policy shall be turned into Folly, and the greatest Strength enfeebled, and neither Courage nor Conduct, Force nor Stratagem shall stand against the Council of the most High.

And the Finger of God is oftentimes so visible in things of this Nature, that when we see the great Disproportion there is betwixt the immediate Causes, and the Effects produced by them, when we see the best laid Schemes broken and disappointed by some unperceived Accidents, and the greatest Strength overpowered by very poor and despicable Instruments, and the greatest Transactions brought about against all Humane Probabilities, we are forced to say, This hath God done, and to confess with all Wise Men, that his Kingdom is an Everlasting Kingdom, and that his Dominion endureth throughout all Ages, that he doth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?

But I pass on to the

Second Thing, viz. The Advantage of this Doctrine to the whole Creation, and especially to all Orders and Ranks of Men.

And here howsoever we consider our Selves, whether in a private Capacity, or as Members of Society, 'tis our Interest and our Happiness, in all respects, to be under the Care and Inspection, the Rule and Government of an Allwise and good God.

At present I will only consider Mankind in Community, and Endeavour to shew how
necessary

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necessary this Doctrine is to the Peace and Welfare of all Publick Societies, whether Sacred or Civil.

And *First*, for that Sacred Society the Church.

This always has been, and always will be the immediate Care of the Almighty: 'Tis the Church that gives him the Honour of all his Works, and brings him the just Tribute and Acknowledgement of the whole Creation, and therefore his Sovereign Power has been abundantly seen in all Ages in the Defence and Preservation of it.

Thus it was in the Infancy of the *Jewish* Church; when the Sons of *Jacob* went down into *Egypt*, they were but a Poor and Despicable Number, and yet in no great compass of Time they grew to such a Height, that they became a Terrour to their Enemies, their Burdens and Oppressions serv'd only to make them Thrive the faster, and all the Arts and Policies of *Pharaoh* to Destroy them, were by an over-ruling Power turn'd to a different End, to render them still more Powerful and more Formidable: And when they were dismiss from their Bondage, 'twas with such visible Marks of the Divine Presence, such plain and palpable Demonstrations of an Almighty Power Guarding and Protecting them, that all the Neighbouring Nations were Astonish'd at the

the Event, and Trembled at their Approach; Nor did this Miraculous Conduct cease till they were fully Settled in the Land of Promise, possessed of a Prosperous and Peacable Government, and had the Free and Glorious Profession of the Worship of that one God among them, by whose mighty Hand, and outstretched Arm, they had been preserved in so many Difficulties.

And from that Time forward no Age past which did not produce some remarkable Instance of the Favour or Displeasure of the Almighty towards that People, according as they Obeyed, or Transgressed, the Laws and Statutes which he gave them.

And so it was in the Infancy of the Christian Church, its Growth and Progress was a clear Instance of a ruling Providence.

When a small handful of Men, and those but meanly Qualified, as to any Natural or Acquired Abilities, did in so small a time encrease to so vast a Number, and propagated the Doctrine of Christ, through the greatest part of the known World, in opposition to all the Religions then in being, the *Jewish* Rites and *Heathen* Superstitions, that had so long a Prescription to plead against it, and in spite of the severest Persecutions of their Enemies without, and all the Treacheries of False Brethren amongst themselves, I say, when the Christian Faith was in this Manner,

ner, and by such Instruments convey'd into, and settled in the Remotest Parts of the World, against all the Difficulties it had to Encounter, who can be so Blind and Stupid as not own that a Power more than Humane, must be concerned in this Mighty Work.

And 'tis very observable of some particular Churches, that so long as they retained the Purity of the Christian Doctrine and Discipline, so long as they kept the Primitive Faith untainted, and their Manners uncorrupt, so long they were secure enough and Flourisht even in the hottest Persecutions: But when they fell off, and neglected their first Works, and Degenerated into Ease and Licentiousness, when they no longer contended for the Faith that was once delivered to the Saints, but suffered it to be Embased by a Mixture of the Grosest and most pernicious Errours, they were soon forsaken of Heaven, and given up a Prey to their Enemies, their Candlesticks were Removed, and their Light Extinguished, as is Evident in those Famous Churches of *Asia*, once the Glory of the Christian World, which are at this Day over-run with the foulest Abominations of that Grand Impostor *Mahomet*, insomuch that there is hardly any Remains of a Church to be seen, where they once Flourished.

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But however it may fare with Particulars, the Catholick Church we are sure shall never fail, that is founded upon a Rock that nothing can Shake, Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God, and from hence we are assured that the Gates of Hell, all the Power and Policy of Satan and his Instruments, shall not prevail against it.

And the like Security has every particular Church, so long as it remains a second Member of the Catholick, it will stand impregnable against all infernal Stratagems to the World's End.

And so will this Church whereof we are Members, and which God's own Right Hand has Planted in these Nations, if we do not confide barely in the Goodness of our Constitution, and the Justice of the Reformation, but take care to Answer the End of them by an Uniform and Regular Piety; if we do not only see to the Soundness of our Principles, but also endeavour that our Practice be agreeable, and are really as good Christians as we profess to be, we may then draw very good Arguments from God Almighty's Care and Watchfulness over the Universal Church for the Security of our own, and venture all our Religious Concerns in his Hands, without the least Scruple or Suspicion of Miscarriages.

Secondly,

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Secondly, The Civil State is equally Safe and Happy under the Protection of this Sovereign Power as the Ecclesiastical : For there is a peculiar Providence that presides over States and Empires, as well as over Individuals, and which is oftentimes more visible in these greater Bodies, than it is in single Persons.

As to particular Persons, it frequently happens according to the Wise Man's Observation, that no Man knoweth Love or Hatred by all that is before him, since good Men are not always attended with a Course of uninterrupted Prosperity, but often meet with sore and sharp Afflictions, and to the unthinking World look as if they were utterly cast off and neglected of Heaven, whilst some very bad Men have enjoyed a long Course of Prosperity and Success, and for their better Fortune have been thought the greater Favourites of Heaven.

And for this way of Proceeding, no doubt but the All-Wise God has abundant Reasons suitable to his Wisdom and Goodness.

But with whole Nations he usually deals after another Manner, and dispenseth Judgments and Mercies to them, according as they Govern themselves by the Rules of Justice and Righteousness; so that *Solo-*

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mon's Observation is good here, *that Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is the Reproach of a People.*

That so it is, may be easily made out by particular Instances.

Look into the Story of the Old Testament, and observe the several Reigns of the Kings of *Judah* and *Israel*, and you will find those Princes only were Great and Fortunate, and advanced the Honour and Grandure of their Kingdoms, that strictly adhered to the Law of *Moses*, that executed Justice and Judgment, that purged the Nation from Idolatry, and encouraged the Worship of the One True God.

And on the other hand, those Princes that neglected their Duty, that were Guilty of great Injustice and Oppression, that went after *Baal*, and suffered their People to fall into the Heathen Pollutions, were always Unfortunate, their Reigns short, and their Families cut off, and their Governments Afflicted with various Calamities, and the People, as they shared in their Princes Guilt, were Partners also in their Misfortunes, and Smarted for their Folly.

And the same Observation no doubt will hold good in most other States, since there is all the reason in the World to believe, that so long as any Government keeps up a due
Reverence

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Reverence to the most High, and commands a strict Observation of God's Laws in the first place, and then pursues the great Ends of Civil Society, in promoting publick Justice, and suppressing Notorious Crimes, so long it will be under a more Propitious and Favourable Aspect of Heaven, and Maintain its Port and Figure in the World.

And on the contrary, where the Reins of Government hang Loose, and no regard is had to Truth and Justice, to Religion and good Manners, but the grossest Sins become National, and have their Guilt aggravated by a Combination of Evil Doers, and all the while the Justice of a Nation is a Sleep; and such as are obliged to Execute Wrath upon the Offenders, are either themselves engaged in the Publick Crimes, or look upon those that are so with an indifferent Eye, there is no doubt to be made, but in this Case, that Providence that watches over it, must be highly Incensed, and more apt to withdraw its Assistance, and to leave such a People to their Approaching Fate, and those many heavy Calamities which such complicated Sins may Justly pull down upon them.

And if the Almighty doth not immediately Thunder down his Vengeance upon such a Wicked People, 'tis either that they

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may have more time to Repent and avert his Fury, or to fill up the Measure of their Sins, as the *Amorites* did, and then fall by a more remarkable Stroke of his Justice.

From all which we may readily Infer, that all the Civil Rights of this Nation, in particular, our Lives, our Fortunes, our Liberties, our Honour, and whatsoever else can render any People happy, can only be Safe under the Protection of the Almighty, that we have more Reason to rely on that, than upon any Humane Counsels, and Policies, Fleets or Armies, or the best Alliances, since that only can be a safe Retreat and inviolable Sanctuary to us, in all our Necessities.

And that Protection will never fail us, if we are good Subjects of this Divine Government, which the Almighty exercises in the World, if we Obey its Laws, and Acquiesce in its Dispensations, if in the honest discharge of our Duty, we commit our Selves and all our Affairs to Heaven's disposal, we shall find this the best Method of our Security, and that which will Entail the Blessings we enjoy, to many succeeding Generations.

And these Blessings are so many, and so considerable, so Plain and Open to our View, upon the Annual returns of this Day, and
upon

upon the Occasion for which we are now Assembled, that we may well confess with the Royal Prophet, *surely the Lord Reigneth*, and to conclude with him, *that the whole Earth, and the Multitude of the Isles*, especially these Isles we Inhabit, have Infinite Reasons to be glad thereof. For to instance in some few Things.

That the best of Princes fills the Throne of these Kingdoms, whose Virtues are so far from being Eclipsed by those of Her Royal Ancestors, that they even add a Lustre and a Brightness to them, whose fervent Piety and Zeal for Religion, may well make a Licentious Age to Blush for its Immoralities, and whose Generous Concern for the Welfare of all Her Neighbours, as well as of Her own People, may Teach all Monarchs, that their Power is never so well displayed in Projects of Ambition, and the Love of Empire, as in Acts of Universal Goodness and Beneficence.

That we have a Wise and Prudent Ministry at the Helm, Men of Abilities to understand the true Interest of their Country, of Integrity and Courage to pursue the same, and whose Honour sets them above those mean Arts of Raising their own Private Fortunes upon the Ruins of the Publick.

That

That this Truly Primitive Church stands Unmoved by all the Attacks that are made upon Her, by the Atheistical Blasphemies of some, the Open and Bare-faced Heresies of others, and that obstinate Schism that is so Industriously kept up, and even Triumphs over all, and can yet shew (God be thanked) a Set of as Pious and Learned Pastors, a Number of as Sincere Devout Members in Her Communion, as any Church in the Christian World can.

That this Monarchy stands upon its Old Basis, and has gained a happy Entail in a Protestant Line, sufficient to Silence some Men's Fears of Popery and Arbitrary Power, if any can do it.

That Peace in spite of all Opposition begins to peep through the Cloud, after a long and dismal Night, to Heal those deep Wounds, which a Bloody and Expensive War, drawn out in length by some Men's insatiable Thirst after Wealth and Power, has Imprinted on these Nations.

These are Blessings of such a Nature as can come from nothing but the immediate Hand of Heaven, and may well convince us, that that God who Ruleth over all, has not forgot to be Gracious to us in these Remote Parts of the World, and that that good Providence which spreads its Wings
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over the whole Creation, has not left us out of its Care and Protection.

And may these Blessings, with whatever else we Need or Enjoy, be still Preserved to us, by the same Almighty Power; May Her Majesties Sacred Person, and that Life upon which so much Depends, be the constant Care of the King of Kings, whom She so truly Represents here on Earth; May She long continue a Nursing Mother to this Church, a Zealous Defender of the Catholick Faith, and a common Parent to all Her People; May Her Pious Endeavours for the good of *Europe*, be still seconded by a Wise and Faithful Ministry, and all Her Cares for the Welfare of Her own People, be Answered with large Returns of Duty and Affection; May all unpeaceable Doctrines, which tend to Disorder and Confusion, be ever Exploded and Discouraged, and all Seditious Practices, especially those Malicious Libels, those Impudent Reflections, upon the Publick Administration never to be endured in any Government, and the lasting Shame and Reproach of our own, may they all meet with that Recompence they deserve, and whilst Envy and Faction, like the Birds of Night, Creep into Holes and Corners, and Vent their ungrateful Murmurs in the Dark, may all our Temples, as oft as this Day returns,

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turns, Sound with the Voice of Praise and Thanksgiving to God the Author of all our Mercies, and all our Streets with Acclamations of Long Life, Honour, and Happiness to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty: May every Loyal Face shine with Chearfulness, and every *English* Heart overflow with Joy, and nothing appear in our whole Conversation, but Mutual Endearments and Congratulations, then we shall not doubt to say with the Psalmist, *Happy are the People that are in such a Case; yea, Blessed are the People, who have the Lord for their God.*



F I N I S.
